

## Sexing the Nation: A Reading of Three Mexican Novels

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### I. Introduction

One reading that can lay bare the interstices of three of Carlos Fuentes' novels is through an analysis of the Eros and Polis as engaged in the nationalist novel. The Eros—in its capacity of unite persons sexually—and the Polis, in its power to connect peoples politically—are seen as manipulating factors that helped to engender the modern nation. In as much as Eros is constitutive of the Polis, the Polis too is a nexus of many public relations of power that are rooted in personal couplings. It is this theorizing that makes Fuentes' novels compelling objects to study; for he, amongst noted Boom writers, devotes careful attention to

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the intertextualities between love and the nation, between the personal and the political, between the private and the public.

This essay will dissect the narrative claims and to suture the possible inconsistencies and spaces in Fuentes' three novels, namely: *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962), *The Old Gringo*, (1985) and *The Years with Laura Díaz* (2001). It problematizes the deconstructive stances of Fuentes' works against the Latin American historical novel's formulation of nationalist romances. In presenting love and sex as impure, corruptible and power-laden, how does Fuentes hope to present the quest for nation-building in terms of the family as its most basic unit? If the equation between the Eros and Polis is unreliably disproportional, does Fuentes propose that nationalist romance novels, or what has been termed as "foundational novels", erroneous? If the Mexican revolution is consistently depicted as unkindly to women and disruptive to familial routine, how must the attendant republican stability give birth to a national life full of hope? Fuentes is not positive.

## II. Policing Desire

Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991), will guide this paper in its project to read Fuentes. Its theorizing primarily works upon the assumption that romantic novels meet the national agenda at a certain juncture. In other words, domestic passion as magnifyingly embodied in courtly, chivalric, gentry-meets-peasant girl scenarios is bolstering a higher, nobler pursuit which is national imagining through the consolidation of patriotic sentiments. The author cites Frederic Jameson's articulation on Third World literature's propensity to be read as "national allegories"; that it is the nature of Third World writing to transpose the individual and the

personal to the public and national. This idea from Jameson, although much criticized by Aijaz Ahmad (1992) as divisive since it categorizes nations into a Capitalist–Socialist–Postcolonial triangulation, is very much useful to Sommer since her project challenges the colonialist discourses' goal to maintain an elitist and patriarchal cultural system as carry over despite (and because of) the national formation.

*Foundational Fictions* (1991) historicizes the eroticism in nationalism. According to Sommer, “it is the erotic rhetoric that organizes patriotic novels” (2). By analyzing novels written after the wars of independence, roughly from 1810 to 1825, she locates that only in the seeming naturalness of heterosexual coupling and familial obligation can readers of the romance mode imagine the nation as real. It is only when love is given characters and sex is intimated that national consolidation becomes “imaginable”; this is when the question of the nation becomes participatory on the level of the reading bourgeois. When characters are attributed signification beyond their fictional selves, only then they become symbolical, hence, pregnant with meaning and potential. For Sommer, it is domestic passions narrativized that make up the “foundational” literature of Latin America. Other studies on the Latin American novels such as Jean Franco’s (1969), Roberto González Echevarría’s (1998), and Philip Swanson’s (2005) support the idea of nationalist novels allegorical potential.

Sommer’s (1991) thesis on the crossroads between nationalism and eroticism is a reformulation of Benedict Anderson’s (1990) “imagined communities” and Michel Foucault’s radical discourses found in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1980). These two landmark theorizings influenced Sommer to inscribe Latin American literature within them. She reformulates Foucault’s articulations on sexual repression as machinery of power in relation to Latin American narratives. She writes that “sexual love was the trope for associative

behavior, unfettered market relationships, and for Nature in general” (her italicization) (35). Her influential book also tries to answer the question why heterosexual monogamy is best utilized by nationalism rather than other forms of coupling. On the other hand, Anderson is used to explain the “fictive” quality of newspaper and novels that made it possible to “imagine one’s community”. He explores why nationalism can rouse such fervor so as to kill others for the nation, or better yet, to die for it. Sommer explains that “while nations were being embodied, their borders meticulously drawn and their resources territorialized, so too were [...] sexual bodies” (37). Indeed, the constitution of a modern person always already implicates a nation and sexuality.

It is in this light that feminists who have theorized on the nation come in. When discussions on the nation openly admit the patriarchal construction of the nationalist discourse, it is always useful to question. When women’s participation are often limited to wives, daughters, mistresses, rape victims, sex slaves, the motherland, and other marginal roles, the nation’s capacity to provide a home and identity is under siege. Many female scholars have theorized on the uneven relationship between nationalism and gender. They argued how the most dominant theories on nationalism are either masculine or plain silent about women participation in nationhood. Anne McClintock (1995) articulates that nationalism is a gendered allegory. A paradox appears: that although the power of the masculine philosophy is enforced by the nation, symbols of nationhood have remained female such as the French Marian, the United States’ Liberty, Germany’s Germania and the Philippines’ Inang Bayan. This seemingly daunting paradox is not a paradox at all but rather a greater instance how patriarchy encroaches the nationalist discourse. Women are seen as wombs which can warmly nest the suckling soldiers of the nation but not as vanguards of nationalist ideology themselves. Without doubt, feminist readings of the nation can help substantiate

Sommer's theorizing (see Walby 1996; Aguilar 1995).

### III. Reading the Sex in the Text

Reading Fuentes' three novels only reinforces what has been said about nationalist projections on women and sexuality; that in Mexico, during the revolution, women are either whores cooking tortilla or cooks that double as whores. Although this description is complicated by the stratification based on race and class, Fuentes takes pains to accommodate all nuances possible. So that *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, *The Old Gringo* and *The Years with Laura Díaz* talk about women not as essentially evil but constructedly evil. In all three novels, Fuentes centers on the delusion of love and the insatiability of the body amid the backdrop of the Mexican revolution; the reason why in all three, the reader encounters the same characters of Villa, Carranza, Obregón, Huerta and Zapata, only interspersed with a few fictional ones. Curiously enough, Fuentes' novels feature many veterans of the Mexican revolution; all of them males. This tendency he tried to veer to another direction by making the character of Laura Díaz, someone who tries to make sense of patriarchal webbing through sexual couplings with men of varying revolutionary shades and integrities.

*The Death of Artemio Cruz*, known for its three-tiered narrative points of view shifting from an interior monologue to a second person subconscious talking in the future tense to a detached third person attempting at objectivity, is quite strong in its Manichean sense of time. His multiple narrations, more than an innovative literary technique during the Boom, contributed to this strict mechanical use of time. Fuentes' chapters are actually dates that mark Artemio's past and present; also a history and the making/writing of that history. This

division of Manichean sense of time leads to a crux/(Cruz) where the former revolutionary (good) and the abusive cacique (bad) bisects. This facet of Artemio extends to his sexual performatives that are not incidental to his national significance.

Artemio is a dark-skinned half breed whose father raped an Indian girl. He was raised outside the respectable arena of Mexican hacienda culture; living with an Indian uncle and sharing co-existence with the most debased of peoples. The Mexican revolution of 1910 gave young Artemio the opportunity to know what power means and to be acquainted with a young idealist, the brother of Catalina. Artemio's newly found political partisanship permitted him to blackmail an aging hacendero of the old system in exchange of the beautiful Catalina. His becoming a local boss, thereby the many opportunities to land grab, to abuse Indian workers, to extort, to sell Mexico to American capitalism, to become a politician, among others, made Artemio a very wealthy man. Upon his deathbed, Artemio forces himself to remember every painful memory of love and hate.

Inasmuch as Artemio's life story is a way for Fuentes to depict a "truthful", less than ideal portrayal of the revolution's career officers, it is a thorough-going discussion of Mexico's aborted revolution. The novel shows how one man's life traverses the many paths carved by national history. These paths, both public and political, are also the very byways that Artemio's inner life, both personal and domestic, has crossed. The novel introduces Regina, a *soldadera*, also Artemio's first great love who suffered the fate of being executed by the Federales. She is the kind of woman whose forgettable peasant origin allows her greater freedom; in her case, to follow, to support and to bed *guerrilleros* from one town to the next in their campaign against government soldiers. Fuentes sees Regina as someone who would follow her man to the ends of the (Mexican) landscape, with a basket of eggs

in hand and a supple body in heat. Because of this, Fuentes sees it necessary to playfully engage Regina with Artemio in a fierce arm wrestle; something that would fuel the memory and testosterone rush of a lowly soldier. One can glimpse here the grave importance that *soldaderas* like Regina played in the revolution, although the gravity of importance is not matched by the respectability accorded to characters like her. Fuentes is clear on this: Regina is a sacrificial body, both her sex and her symbol, to the movement that needs its young. Towards the end of his life, Artemio resurrects the beautiful memory of Regina's loyalty and courage. He apotheosizes her as a goddess whose small measures permit an imagining by which Mexico has engendered a new republic. Her death did not make the revolution more meaningful; only more comprehensible.

Artemio then becomes enamored with Catalina, a descendant of creole landowners, who is torn between marrying an *estrangero* and falling into the insufferability of being socially degraded by the onslaught of class reorientation in postwar Mexico. Fuentes made her to choose a more pragmatic decision. However, cohabitation with Artemio is never easy. This is complicated by Catalina's longing for another man and class loyalty inherited from Don Lorenzo. Catalina's disgust with Artemio stems from the encroachment of her social space by a lower class; her stain is the sort of unwashable stigma of the class kind. Artemio is amazed by her resilience and fortitude in spiting him openly during the day while he is surprised by Catalina's shameless call for penetration at night. Fuentes' play on guilt and pleasure is something very Catholic indeed. Artemio's anticlericalism is obviously a critique of Catalina's moral ambivalence, something that he did not know he had until the end. This is concretely explained in one occasion during Artemio's final phase: Catalina prematurely invites in a priest despite her knowledge of Artemio's feelings towards religion in general. She wishes him a

peaceful end and a reconciled beginning with God. But when sick Artemio begged her to close the curtains, she did not heed. Catalina's and Artemio's coupling is one dubious love affair, but it is a family affair. The years of domesticity and the slow process of being changed by it implies a summation of emotional investment as evidenced by Artemio's profound love for his son that he was willing to send him to Spain to fight against Franco. That is far from simplistic; Artemio, in theory and in practice, transposed his nationalist promise aborted by the vicissitudes of ordinariness of daily living to his son. The boy Lorenzo, a scion of Artemio's personal redemption and national aspiration, is a product of this domesticity with Catalina. The boy Catalina gave birth to would die in the civil war, a fact that Artemio knew profoundly. So, why did Artemio want a male Regina; a body sacrificed for the freedom of another? It is here that Catalina becomes Regina. In behalf of her own flesh and blood, a son of a *patria*, Catalina is a simulacrum of a motherland giving life to its little boys. Catalina finally almost equals the greatness of Regina if not greater because Catalina reproduces the nation's sons while Regina merely dies for it. Catalina is a live womb whereas Regina is an aborted one.

Here, Fuentes' *Artemio Cruz* is unquestionably different from Sommer's "foundational" romances that "passion for conjugal and sexual union spills over to a sentimental readership in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts" (5). The character of Artemio does not solicit empathy from the novel's readers; there is no attempt to justify the plunder he had done against the (abstract) Mexican people. The strains of sentimentalism found in nationalist novels are not used by Fuentes to gain partisan readership. *Artemio Cruz* does not directly capitalize on the formula of the erotic in the nation. It does it very subtly by a most unexpected *coup de grâce*: Artemio sends his son to the trenches in Spain during the civil war.

*The Old Gringo* (1985) is another Fuentes novel that compellingly inserts eroticism, the sadness that accompanies it, and the nation. Glenn Willeford discusses how Ambrose Bierce's disappearance into the Mexican war front in 1913 that inspired Fuentes' narrative is itself full of fantastical speculations. The American journalist's civil war credibility prompts many observers to say that his willful disappearance is an attempt to rescue what has remained of his literary career. Whatever it was that truly transpired in the final stretch of Bierce's life is resuscitated by Fuentes' fictive work: a novel that implicates the gringos in the Mexican war landscape.

The novel opens with a flashback narration of Harriet Winslow's remembrances of the old gringo she met and the military general she made love with in war-torn Chihuahua. Then it tells the arrival of the old gringo in El Paso and the crossing of the Rio Grande border. The old gringo sought the company of Pancho Villa's troops and became a foot soldier under Gen. Tomás Arroyo. His extraordinary bravery drew attention to the gringo's presence and earned him the moniker "the gringo who came to Mexico to die". (For the real Bierce, going to Mexico "beats old age, disease or falling down the cellar stairs", according to Willeford.) In an occupied Chihuahua estate, he met a stubborn *gringa* in the name of Winslow: a Puritan virgin, a lower class normal-school graduate, and armed with white men's burden mentality. She arrived in the hacienda hoping to serve as a governess but found a community of *guerrilleros* and *soldaderas* encamped in the ransacked mansion. Gen. Arroyo entrusted her to her fellow white American. It is then that the reeducation of the racist Winslow started. Meanwhile, Gen. Arroyo tasked the old gringo to execute an enemy; he refused to follow the order. As Gen. Arroyo threatened to shoot the old gringo in return, Winslow intervened. Offering herself up to the commander who openly lusts after her, Winslow opened the female Pandora's box that engaged

the self-righteous moralist to perform the unspeakable. On the other hand, the Mexican officer still pursued his sentence upon the old gringo despite Winslow's intervention. When legendary Pancho Villa heard of this, of course, with the fact that the old gringo is a gringo and the new superpower meticulously observing its backdoor neighbor, he ordered the death of Gen. Arroyo. The novel ends with the safe return of Winslow in the United States; only made unsafe by her newfound politicized self-knowledge courtesy of the Mexican revolution. In this state of mind, she becomes the gringa with an albatross hung on her neck telling and retelling a story that is much greater than her or the dead *desaparecido*.

Reading the *The Old Gringo* by Fuentes compels one to think what function do heavily-charged coital encounters between Gen. Arroyo and Winslow serve. Do these copulatory skirmishes between the two speak of the greater tension between the Mexican people's revolutionary agenda and the conservative capitalist American ideology? Does the manner of breaking Winslow's hymen a breaking free from her political naivety? Is this a commentary from Fuentes on Mexican-American relations? This novel tells of how violence is inherent in heterosexual eroticism as much as it is in the birthing of the nation.

Fuentes featured a plot that celebrates the masculinity of a revolutionary man; a justification that the rule of eros and thanatos can be as disruptive as possible at a time of power struggle. Among the characters, Fuentes gave the most depth to Gen. Arroyo. While it is Bierce that opened the narrative and Winslow the one who closed it, Gen. Arroyo did most of the talking. He is the fulcrum that balances the presences of the old gringo and the gringa in Mexico: it is he who allowed Bierce to grant himself a meaningful *ungringo* death and he who changed Winslow forever. Fuentes characterized Arroyo as the kind of man who demystifies sex and lust, makes it the visceral attention it deserves, takes pride in performing it. That is his unfair

advantage over a Calvinist woman that is Winslow. All men, like Arroyo, in patriarchal societies, lead women towards the unknown. Gen. Arroyo tells her: “[a]nyone who touches you enchants you. You must remain frozen until someone else comes to touch you. Then you can move again [...] You are bedazzled. But you do not own yourself anymore” (124). What follows is the learning of one’s sex; an exploration how the female body is a repository of dormant pleasure. However, the moral double standard that women are subjected to instantaneously follows her, so that Winslow tells herself: “he had you as if you were an object; you let yourself be violated by the animal appetite of that man; he took you to satisfy his arrogance and his vanity, nothing more” (140).

*The Years with Laura Díaz* is the youngest of all three novels discussed here. It is thirty eight years junior than *Artemio Cruz* and fifteen years younger than *Old Gringo*. The point in calculating the age gaps amongst these works by one man may imply an expected maturation of any sort; an improvement, a move towards sophistication. One might choose to see Fuentes’ foray into a more maximized use of literary techniques such as multiple narration shifts without transition, the use of dialogue within prose, the insertion of poetry, the insertion of a letter to solve a mystery, the profuse references to history, as progress from the simpler previous novels or to see it as the decline of an established writer. On the other hand, one might prefer to evaluate *Laura Díaz* as a more politically correct way of portraying a woman character as compared to the female characters of the first two for its controlling feminist perspective; or to perceive it as a failed effort of a macho writer to insert a female-lead into the male-dominated Mexican revolution. Whichever way, Fuentes’ novel tells us something valuable about nation and women.

The novel chronicles the many lives, roles and men of Laura Díaz as

it retells the many chapters of Mexico's history. From an opening set in the United States, then back in 1905 in Mexico, then return once more to the US, this historical novel of Fuentes narrates the difficulties Laura Díaz experienced as a granddaughter to an rural oligarch, a daughter to physically broken parents, a stepsister to a dead hero, a wife to a compromising labor leader, an aspiring photographer, and most of all, as female Mexican national. The plot shifts from one time frame to another signaled by the year at the beginning of each chapter (reminiscent of *Artemio Cruz*). All of twenty-four chapters of the book look into the encounters of Laura Díaz without the usual chronological arrangement of a realist plot. Needless to say, if one wishes to read on basic Marxism, anarcho-syndicalist spread from Europe to Latin America, Mexico's national artists like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, the Spanish civil war, the Mexican revolution, the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism, Edmund Husserl and the tradition of phenomenology in Germany, the Jewish problem, postwar American capitalism, the Cold War of the 1950s, McCarthyite red hunt, a few principles in photography, the student revolt in 1968, one can just consult this novel. Interestingly, Fuentes discussed almost everything that is possible from 1905 to 1999; but not one reference to Latin American's Boom's magic realism. This peculiar choice is a kind of self-consciousness that most historiographical novels exhibit except that, in this case, it is a two-fold self-consciousness because of the strange elision of the Boom's cultural presence.

Like the many literary explorations done on prominent Filipino families (McCoy 2000), *Laura Díaz* the novel is a fictional expression of feudal dynasties whose empire of businesses grew out of rent-seeking as exemplified by the Díazes. Sommer sees the conceit between private couplings and public relations: "marriages bridge[d] regional, economic, and party differences during the years of national

consolidation" (18). True enough, considering Mexico's and the Philippines' strata of creoles and mestizos who do the negotiating between foreign transactions and native labor, the years of establishing national corporations and institutions implicate the forging of capital forces by merging families through marriages. In the novel, more than Laura Díaz's couplings that involved men of radical politics, it was her son, Danton, who exemplifies this by marrying the daughter of a wealthy local capitalist with his middle class background backed by theory of global economics at a time of American transnational capital.

Despite its many questions the novel raises, the foremost in *Laura Díaz* is its attempt to theorize on the question: what does it mean to become a liberated woman? Does this liberation emanate from some force outside her self, or is it an innate search for freedom without boundaries? Laura Díaz the character seems to answer this question in the arena of sexuality. As a young girl, she felt a very special bond with her stepbrother Santiago I; a kind of innocent incestuous love. Sadly, handsome Santiago met an early death as he was shot by the Federales for conspiring with revolutionaries: a first taste of national sacrifice for Laura Díaz. After her teenage years passed in the comfort of family home, Laura Díaz decided to marry Juan Francisco Lopez Greene, a labor organizer whose efforts helped maintain the integrity of post-revolutionary politics of the left. Her marriage to Lopez Greene did not last; Fuentes made sure that readers understand that Laura Díaz would not put up with a chauvinist husband who undermines her femininity. She bore him two sons: Danton, an incarnate of the bedeviled Artemio Cruz, and Santiago II, the sensitive artist. After leaving Lopez Greene, she led an anarchic life of the liberated woman with the decadent Mexican petit-bourgeoisie. The highlight of which is sexing Orlando Ximénez, one shadowy character who undoubtedly represents the mindless culturati. Laura Díaz decided to try once more

with Lopez Greene but was unhappy; then, she found herself a “Spanish hidalgo” in the person of Jorge Maura. This Maura is a Madrileño exile whose heroic exploits as a socialist fighting Franco’s falangists impressed the woman deeply. Maura’s musings on German phenomenology and Marxism are something that earned the fancy of a colonial-peripheral subject (as opposed to the Euro-cosmopolite) like her. With him, Laura Díaz experienced the literal sexual liberation of a woman. Sadly, Maura left Laura Díaz to rescue his beloved Raquel Mendes-Alemán from the Nazi concentration camp. She then moved to another lover in the person of Jewish Harry Jaffe, a Hollywood screenwriter persecuted in the 1950s by the un-American activities hunters. He sought refuge in the nearby Mexico where a community of émigrés, mostly artists, congregated safely. Laura Díaz cohabited with Jaffe in an obscure town where he was dying slowly. There were no more lovers for Laura Díaz after Jaffe; photography preoccupied her this time. She had the opportunity to befriend Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. These socialist avant-garde artists took notice of Laura Díaz’s outstanding beauty and character by asking her to run errands for them, and inevitably, asking her to model for one of Rivera’s murals. A penultimate act of sealing this artistic comradeship was Laura Díaz photographing a dead Frida Kahlo. In the words of Fuentes: while “Frida gathers together what is scattered: Laura photographed that integration” (434). The semantic alliance between death and art, decomposition and preservation, meaning and power, as envisioned by Fuentes is palpable here.

It is quite clear that this project by Fuentes is an attempt to portray a feminized nation. That instead of conjuring another Artemio or Gen. Arroyo, he thought of making her female. Laura Díaz’s intelligence, strength of character, artistry, intimidating physical beauty, among others, are all substantiation to create a heroine that encompasses all divisions and categories. In spite of this, Laura Díaz’s dalliances –romantic,

sexual, artistic, or a combination of all three—with men of impressive persuasions, mostly of national importance and representative of specific moments of radical politics in history, prove Fuentes' (sub)conscious thinking that women, yes even the stronger ones, are in the final instance backed up by men. By perversely showing that Laura Díaz is the ultimate “foundational” female character who experienced Mexico's nation-building one way or another only highlighted women's peripheral stature. This is so because women of all social, cultural and racial classes cannot be uniformly represented by Laura Díaz. Especially in societies such as Mexico's and the Philippines', the privileged *mestiza* is an anti-thesis of nationalist whose emblematic face is literally *indio*. The radiance of Laura Díaz's radicalized bourgeois experience of the nation erases the presences of her *others*, thus, the glaring absence of the marginalized Mexican woman.

Another thorny issue that Fuentes went into is to introduce Laura Díaz as the new paradigm of sexuality for women that sit comfortably with (Mexican) modernity? Does this imply that foundational novel's romantic domesticity as paradigm for women is no longer operative? It appears that the answer is “no”. George Mosse's (1985) study on German manliness and nationalism also sheds light regarding the durable correlation between the division of labor in capitalism and the normative sexual behavior that its bourgeois society upholds. According to him, “[i]f the bourgeoisie had created the social dynamic of modernity, it also sought to keep it under control” (24). While the division of labor between men and women relegates the latter to that of familial responsibilities, the sexual behavior required of them is exclusively heterosexuality—the performative act of female reproduction. So that sexual perversion, in this case the wastefulness of sodomy and lesbian sex, must be kept under control. This exertion of control extends to that of friendship; this is because while heterosexuality does manifest

between two sexes, homosexuality is an arena between friends. Mosse, citing Rousseau's idea of national institutions, says that "men and women should not be allowed to choose freely who their friends should be" (66). Men and women should be guided as to how they choose their friends according to the national ideal. The kind of healthy camaraderie this implies is for the good of the national body, literal and figurative. Early discourses on the nation, according to Mosse, theorized that eroticism is the only a heightened form of friendship; that homosexuality is the penultimate expression of friendship amongst men and women.

This discussion leads back to Fuentes' novel whose main character was introduced to Frida Kahlo, a known artist and socialist whose bisexuality offended her contemporaries. Kahlo takes fancy on Laura Díaz, Fuentes was clear on that. However, whether Kahlo had sex with Laura Díaz or not, is both telling on Fuentes' vision of his female heroine. The text says "no". For a reason, the author did not go into that. Could it be that he could not fictionalize Kahlo and Laura Díaz having sex because it did not "happen"? Quite the contrary; if he could fictionalize Ambrose Bierce's disappearance in *The Old Gringo*, why couldn't he fictionalize the sexually-charged Laura Díaz having intercourse with Kahlo? This is a significant question for an answer to this has a great deal of implication to Fuentes' position on women's narrative and the national question. It seems that Fuentes despite his transgressions on the portrayal of a representative Mexican woman still adheres to the notion that the nation must absorb the "excesses" of sexuality and control its practice that goes beyond what is normative. Despite of Fuentes' efforts to picture a female national figure who is not merely an emblematic face of a nation, Laura Díaz's vacillating sexual projection betrays this. She, of very radical politics and sexual openness, can not and must not cross the boundary. In other words,

Marianne, Britannia, Germania and yes, Inang Bayan, can only be heterosexual despite the onslaught of a nation's pursuit of modernity. Laura Díaz is contained subversion as envisioned by Fuentes. The character maintains the division of labor between men and women not on the level of economics per se but on the idea of birthing as labor in itself. Laura Díaz is a mother to men whose lives are intertwined with that of the national life; she, therefore, must remain untouched by homosexuality since this is her share of the national "labor". Lesbian sex or romance does not sit well with the idea of the Mexican nationalist mother as if this kind of coupling contaminates the purity of the national imagination. In the novel, Fuentes is content to let Laura Díaz and Kahlo consummate their love through a final photograph of a dead woman: capturing her ecstatic essence at the hour of her death but without the political implications of (lesbian) sex.

#### IV. Conclusion: Refounding the Foundational

The novels *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, *The Old Gringo* and *The Years with Laura Díaz* are works that seemingly invite a critiquing that would highlight its radicalism in the subject of the nation and sexuality. The novels go against the grain of what foundational romance fictions mean. This only seems logical for the foundational was thought of at a time when Independence wars were fought, while Fuentes' articulations on the nation are mostly dated during and after the Mexican revolutionary war. The foundational romance novels that subscribe to the belief that it is through love—the family, the private and domestic life—by which we imagine our individual positions in relation to one another; and the way we imagine this collectivity as oneness that we call the nation has found continuity, despite the seeming incongruence, in the

aberrant, violative sexual performatives that Fuentes chose to depict the turbulent Mexican society. This is because the chauvinistic standard by which these novels gauge women is the same normative idealization of womanhood vis-à-vis the masculine national man: strong, powerful and in control.

It must be clear that Fuentes is not a “foundational” nationalist writer; he is a “Boom” nationalist writer. This difference demarcates his territory in terms of perceived radicalized rewriting of Mexico’s history as opposed to the “foundational” need to explain the serviceability of the nation. The difference also allows Fuentes much experimentation on language and literary techniques: the use of non-linear narration, multiple points of view, shifting narrators, among others. Suffice it to say, Fuentes wishes to deconstruct the foundation. This he did remarkably to the point that his novels read like high modernist text confused and intoxicated with its forced difficulty. Despite Fuentes’ objective to rewrite Mexico’s painful past to infuse it with politically rectifying ideals—it appears that his novels are “foundational” after all, not deconstructive.

## Abstract

The essay is a reading of Carlos Fuentes’ three novels using primarily the theorizing of Doris Sommer on Latin American fiction. The approach is to render a deconstructive analysis in the light of nationalist conception of sexuality, and to expose the very sexual allegories in forging a concept of the nation. While attempting to explore the ways patriarchal meanings are carefully embedded in the text through narrative strategies and literary techniques, the essay also brings to fore the paradoxes of using female protagonists in order to subvert accusations of

masculine literary presence. It is also questioned in the text how and why prized “nationalist” novels such as Fuentes’ heavily invest on sexual couplings and metaphorical meanings ascribed to specifically heterosexual relationships. In conclusion, while these novels do not categorically belong to Latin America’s “foundational” literature because of their obvious self-conscious modernism, they are neither deconstructive in terms of nationalist formulations on sex and love.

Key words: Carlos Fuentes, Foundational Novel, Nationalism, Sexual Allegories, Mexico / 카를로스 푸엔테스, 건국소설, 민족주의, 성적 알레고리, 멕시코

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